
A Labor of Love *by Terry Brim*

For many of us, owning and restoring old corvettes is either a business, an investment, a challenge, a hobby, or we do it for our personal pleasure. For Steve Salley, restoring old corvettes is a passion, a labor of love for doing something few of us will ever know or understand.

Corvette's weren't always in Steve blood. It was 1969 and Steve was in the 8th grade with about \$90 bucks in his pocket. (I never did ask him how he got that kind of money back then, but I'm sure that's a story for another day.) At any rate, Steve was angling to buy a 1961 Ford of all things! Like all of us however, Steve had a dad who had other plans. His dad wouldn't let him buy the 61' but told Steve, he could buy a Model A Ford if he could find one....probably thinking no way Steve would ever find a Model A for \$90 bucks.

Undaunted, Steve managed to get hold of a copy of the Trading Post, it had just come out and was free at that time. Sure enough, looking through the Trading

Post, Steve found a Model A for sale in Kettering for \$250. Now I ask you, how many of us in the 8th grade back then would lay out \$250 for a Model A Ford? Well, I now know of at least one person!

Turns out the guy had started to make a street rod out of it, putting a 39' Ford rear end in it, a Corvair front end and so on. As Steve began to work on the Model A and search for parts, he came across a guy in Fairborn that his dad knew who had a Model A along with some spare parts. After a phone call Steve headed for Fairborn. Sure enough, the guy had the part Steve needed, but he also had

something else that would change Steve's life, at least as related to cars. Sitting next to the Model A roadster was his son's 60' corvette fuelie stripped to the bare glass with the engine sitting on an engine stand. The vette was for sale, but had a price tag of \$1,000, much to rich for a kid who

wasn't even old enough to drive yet!

Steve says he remembers looking at the car however thinking man, that's a neat car I'd like to have one of them someday.sound familiar?

Now, the real twist of fate....the guy was selling the 40 Ford because he had just bought a 60' corvette fuelie....you guessed it, the same 60 vette Steve had seen in Fairborn.

After that, Steve began looking in the Trading Post for Corvettes. Obviously, the love affair was on! In the mean time, Steve remembers his older brother had to drive him everywhere as he wasn't old enough yet to even have a driver's license.

Steve didn't find a corvette, but he did find a 40' Ford in Beavercreek for \$150. The car had a solid body and frame but was minus an engine. Undaunted, Steve bought the 40' Ford. Now, the real twist of fate....the guy was selling the 40 Ford because he had just bought a 60' corvette fuelie....you guessed it, the same 60 vette Steve had seen in Fairborn. According to

Continued on page 2

[A Labor of Love \(con't\)](#)

Continued from page 1

Steve, this peaked his interest in Corvette's even more.

Finally in his senior year in high school, Steve found a 58' corvette for sale in Germantown. Unfortunately, the 58' was in parts and wasn't all there. Seems the firewall had caught on fire! But, there was another car that came with it.....another incomplete 58' vette which had the front end missing but which had a complete firewall. Well in Steve's

mind 2 parts make a whole, so he bought both cars for \$850... He had his first Corvette or more correctly, Steve had his first 2 Corvettes. At the same time, Steve says he rented his neighbors garage for \$25/mo (gee, I wonder if his neighbor's name was Sliemers). That according to Steve got the ball rolling in Corvettes.

Steve kept the car for about two years however back then, there was not a lot of restoration parts available like there is today and Steve decided the best thing to do was sell the 58' and put the Money toward something

he could drive. Since then, Steve says he has owned a number of Corvettes.... obviously; he has a real passion for these cars!

Steve is also a realist however, even though he has a passion for these cars, he also considers them a good investment. The added benefit according to Steve is that he is able to take something, a hobby he enjoys, where he is able to meet a lot of nice people, make a lot of good friends

Finally in his senior year in high school, Steve found a 58' Corvette for sale in Germantown. Unfortunately, the 58' was all apart and wasn't all there.

along the way and yet is able to realize some appreciation in his investments. Sounds like he has it all together and articulates what our hobby is all

about!

Having had many Corvettes over the years, I had to ask Steve if he had a favorite?....Without a moments hesitation came his answer, a 57' as far as styling and appearance. As far as drivability and

appearance..65'to 67' Corvette's.

Steve does have a 57' which he is doing a body off restoration. He recently sold his daily driver at Knoxville this spring, a red 75' convertible. He is currently working on a 65 roadster which will be his next driver for a year or so.

About a year and half ago, Steve had a really nice red/red 72 coupe with 42K original miles. That car is currently in Madison, Wisconsin at Quaker Steak and Lube. He purchased this car from twin brothers who had owned it since 1978. They had purchased it from the original owner. The car was an absolutely immaculate car both inside and out. The



Continued from page 3

[A Labor of Love \(con't\)](#)

Continued from page 2

carpet was also perfect , showing no sign of wear.

Had Steve joined the chapter before he sold it, he says that he would have had it judged and thinks it would have done “very well” By the looks of these pictures, that’s probably an understatement!

Although Steve knew most everyone who started our NCRS Chapter, he says he is not big on clubs and was a little hesitant to get into it. After attending a few of



our meetings however, Steve has not missed very many meetings. They are very informative and fun without a lot of infighting which most clubs have.

In walking through Steve’s shop, he had 3-4 vette’s in the middle of restoration. In the corner was a 60’ which was stripped and undergoing a frame off restoration.



Interestingly when I asked Steve if he was restoring the cars as a business, he hesitated, sort of laughed and said “yeah I guess so, you don’t make a lot of money in the restoration business....this is more because I like to do it”. Steve has a young man working for him that he is teaching the business to. This allows Steve to stay involved with Corvette restorations while still having time for

Although Steve knew most everyone who started our NCRS Chapter, he says he is not big on clubs and was a little hesitant to get into it



his main machine shop business. Steve says he

spends many evenings however doing what he loves and that is restoring old corvettes!

Steve is also doing a body off on a 65’ coupe. Like many of these old cars, Steve didn’t realize just



how bad the frame was until he had the body off the car. At that point, he discovered the inside frame rails were also rusted and much time was spent getting the frame right before dipping and

painting. In addition, this particular 65’ had some damage which required Steve to try a couple of aftermarket fenders. Not satisfied with the fit of the aftermarket fenders however, he found a NOS fender panel which he finally put on the car to get the right fit.

Continued on page 4

[A Labor of Love \(con't\)](#)

Continued from page 3

At about this time, it became apparent to me that Steve's work really is a Labor of Love and he isn't satisfied until he gets it right.



Steve was working on another vette, a 63' coupe which had been hit in the front. According to Steve, the most difficult part of this restoration was getting the headlight buckets right....you mid year owners can probably appreciate that statement!



As an aside, interestingly enough, Steve's first experience working with fiberglass was not on a Corvette, but

rather on a 65 XKE of all things. The same year he bought the 58's, he bought an XKE from a guy in Bellbrook. Turns out the top of the fenders of the XKE were rusted out and Steve used fiberglass to mold a piece of aluminum channel to the inner fender as part of the repair process.

Yet another car in Steve's shop was the 65' roadster mentioned earlier. Seems like most old vette's have an interesting story behind them. According to Steve, about 10 years ago a guy called him saying that he



heard Steve bought Corvette parts and would he be interested in buying a hardtop for a 65 roadster? Steve bought the hardtop and while he was

there told the guy if he ever wanted to sell the roadster let him know. About two years later, the guy called Steve and said he was ready to sell the roadster! The car is interesting in that it is a basic 250 hp, automatic with PS, telescopic column and teakwood wheel. Steve is doing a frame on restoration on this car to make a nice driver.

To appreciate the kind of nose Steve has for these cars, he recently

purchased another 72' 454 Corvette from the original owner who bought it new in 1972. The car came with every piece of paperwork, even had the original tires! The car was purchased new at Ande Chevrolet in Lawrenceburg, Indiana.



According to Steve, All the car needed was a little "touch up" . I'm sure the heads are still turning wherever this baby goes.

Continued on page 5

A Labor of Love (con't)

Continued from page 4

Oddly enough, unlike many of us, Steve didn't get his interest in cars from his



dad; his dad was a tool maker and a cabinet maker. Steve did however have 7 brothers and sisters. Being 1 of 8 kids, he grew up around a lot of older guys with neat cars...that is apparently what triggered his interest in cars and forged his "Labor of Love".

